

BUREAU OF COUNTERTERRORISM

Country Reports on Terrorism 2014

MALDIVES

Overview: Maldives, an archipelago consisting of nearly 1,200 coral islands grouped into 26 atolls with a population of just over 393,000, is strategically located in the heart of the Indian Ocean, close to international sea lanes. Press reports in 2014 indicated up to 200 Maldivians had traveled to Syria or Iraq and at least six had been killed in action.

Since 2010, concerns about the activities of a small number of local extremists who support violence and have involvement with transnational terrorist groups have been mounting. Young Maldivians, especially those within the penal system and otherwise marginalized members of society, are at risk of becoming radicalized and some have already joined violent extremist groups. According to reporting in the Maldivian media, radical Maldivians have made connections to violent extremist affiliates throughout the world and a small but steady stream of Maldivians leave the country to train and fight with these groups.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: The Maldivian Parliament (Majlis) passed a new penal code in April 2014, which, once implemented, should improve the government's ability to prosecute individuals for recruiting, financing, or otherwise supporting terrorism. However, the government was still drafting criminal procedure codes and evidence bills needed to help enforce the new penal code at year's end. Neither Maldivian law nor the new penal code permit restrictions on travel of would-be foreign terrorist fighters or detention of those who have been turned back on suspicion they were headed to a war zone.

Responsibility for Maldivian counterterrorism efforts is divided among the Maldivian Police Service (MPS) and National Defense Force (MNDF), the latter of which has Navy, Marines, and Coast Guard branches. The MPS has the greatest capacity among these entities; cooperation and information sharing among the agencies is very limited. The Maldivian government worked with the United States to install the Personal Identification Secure Comparison and Evaluation System (PISCES) at Maldives' main international airport and at Malé seaport in August 2013.

The Maldivian government arrested several people possibly associated with violent extremism in 2014, but did not arrest Maldivians who were returned to the country on suspicion they intended to fight in Syria or Iraq. Existing law severely limits the ability of law enforcement agencies to prosecute such cases.

Maldives continued to participate in the Department of State's Antiterrorism Assistance (ATA) program, which provided training to the MPS, Maldivian Coast Guard, prosecutors, and port and border control officers. In 2014, ATA provided training and assistance in such fields as vital infrastructure security, maritime port and harbor security management, countering domestic and transnational terrorism, first

response to terrorist incidents, interdicting terrorist activities, soft target protection, and interviewing terrorist suspects.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Maldives is a member of the Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering, a Financial Action Task Force-style regional body. Maldivian authorities believe funds are currently being raised in Maldives to support terrorism abroad; however, they do not have reliable information regarding the amounts involved. While no official studies have yet been conducted, the Maldivian Central Bank believes criminal proceeds mainly come from domestic sources; a large percentage of Suspicious Transaction Reports the Central Bank receives are related to Maldivians. The Maldives Monetary Authority reports informal money transfer networks (*hawala*) are used to transfer funds between the islands, although the extent to which these systems are employed to launder money is unclear.

The Maldivian government monitors banks, the insurance sector, money remittance institutions and finance companies, and requires the collection of data for wire transfers. Financial institutions other than banks and intermediaries in the securities sector, however, are not subject to current anti-money laundering/countering the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) obligations. Insurance companies and intermediaries, finance companies, money remittance service providers, foreign exchange businesses, and credit card companies therefore operate outside the AML/CFT framework.

The Maldivian government implements UNSCRs 1267 (1999) and follow-on resolutions and 1373 (2001), and monitors and regulates alternative remittance services, despite the fact that they lie outside the AML/CFT framework. The Maldivian government did not report any efforts to seize terrorist assets in 2014.

According to the Maldivian government, capacity building of relevant supervisory and regulatory authorities such as the Maldives Monetary Authority and the Capital Market Development Authority, law enforcement authorities (the Anti-Corruption Commission, Department of Immigration and Emigration, Maldives Customs Service, and MPS), and the judiciary is needed to properly counter money laundering and terrorist financing. Government of Maldives officials attended the Department of State-sponsored “Good Giving” conference at Embassy Dhaka in December 2014 on Countering Terrorist Finance and Violent Extremism.

For further information on money laundering and financial crimes, see the *2014 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR), Volume 2, Money Laundering and Financial Crimes*: <http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/index.htm>.

Regional and International Cooperation: The U.S. Special Operations Command encouraged MNDF participation as a member of the Global Special Operations Force network that collaborates on common security challenges and actively supports multilateral and regional security cooperation efforts, such as global programs that focus on de-radicalization and counterterrorism issues. Maldives is a member of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. Maldives participated, along with India and Sri Lanka, in the network’s third biannual security consultation in March 2014. Topics discussed included

security force capacity building and increasing cooperation in maritime domain awareness. In accordance with Global Counterterrorism Forum Good Practices, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs convened a forum of Islamic scholars to examine the concept of *jihad*, with the objective of preventing Maldivian citizens from becoming foreign terrorist fighters in Syria and Iraq.

Countering Radicalization to Violence and Violent Extremism: The Maldivian government continued to recognize that counter-radicalization efforts are a critical component to long-term success against violent extremism. Since 2011, the government has sought to counter the influence of extremist ideology by actively intervening in religious life. These interventions take the form of mandating persons wanting to serve as imams to undergo a six-month state-approved training, as well as disseminating approved sermons for Friday prayers. The government is also in the process of building an Islamic university in the capital city of Malé that will offer courses in comparative religion in addition to Islamic studies. The university's key objective will be to expose Maldivian students to the academic study of religion as a counterweight to extremist discourses and messaging.